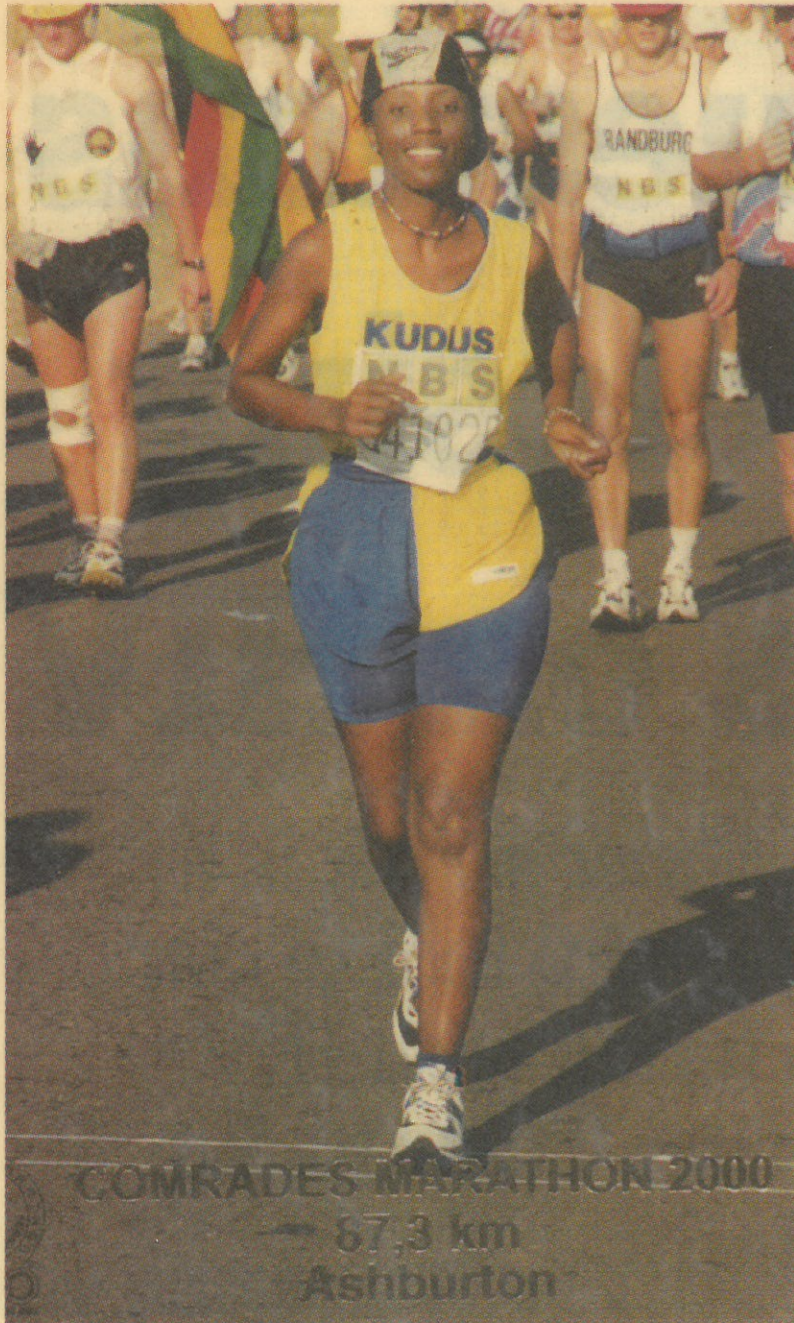


I'm here to make a difference



COMRADE . . . Running the gruelling comrades marathon three times has helped strengthen Khanyi's mental resolve for success and achievement

Never mind where you come from. It's where you're going that matters the most, Khanyi Mlambo tells Sandile Memela

KHANYI Mlambo is not yet a household name, and especially not in the music and entertainment world, but she will soon become a sought-after figure.

Those who know the value of power have already made moves to endear themselves to her, while others are already apprehensive a no-nonsense person has taken up the position of sponsorship director for Standard Bank. What this means is that any decision to do with the bank's involvement in cricket, the visual arts, the Joy of Jazz series or even the SA Music Awards needs her stamp of approval.

She is one of the increasing number of black African women who are going places.

Mlambo is a remarkable woman who commands attention and . . . perhaps power!

She is indeed, one delights to say, the kind of person who makes no excuses about growing up in the townships or being a victim of apartheid. Mlambo believes it doesn't matter where you come from; it's where you are going that matters.

"When I was appointed to the position, I wanted to scream to the world and say 'I am somebody!' I have always believed nothing stops women from reaching for their goals.

"In fact, it is a myth there are things women cannot do, considering they can take pain.

"Every opportunity is now open for us, and people should believe in themselves as the mind is everything," says Mlambo.

Mlambo has been thrown into the proverbial deep end since she took up the position.

Though it is still too early to say how she is doing, she comes across as well-adjusted and ready for the challenge.

"Of course, I have no experience in this particular field, but it has provided me with an opportunity to learn.

"As far as I am concerned, it does not matter what your background is as long as you have what it takes and truly believe you can make a qualitative difference through your input," says Mlambo.

She's done well over the past seven years. At Corobrick she rose from being an architect to sitting on the board and being a new-business director.

Her achievements were well above average in the sense of boosting the company's profile and connecting it with the African community.

It is hard to imagine a young woman in her 30s holding down a high-profile, responsible corporate job, corresponding with UCT's School of Business, raising a child as a single parent, and pursuing a post-graduate diploma in advanced marketing. But Mlambo did it all in 1996.

She is self-driven and motivated, and she earnestly wants to contribute to the transformation that is underway in the country, especially in the corporate world.

"I make no excuses about the fact that my job is, at the end of the day, about the bottom line, making more money for the bank.

"It means a great deal to me that I am a face of the bank. My vision is to make this position relevant and meaningful by giving the banking field a more humane face.

"I do not see how an institution can succeed without connecting with the people it serves. This is what I want to help achieve for the bank, among other goals," says Mlambo.

She has a personal style that is

tinged with the spirit of ubuntu – African humanity – and yet remains cosmopolitan, well-mannered and charming.

That's quite an achievement considering that she comes from a poor, working-class Soweto past.

Mlambo is fully aware she is walking on a tightrope by being a black African female working in a white-controlled environment.

"I demand to be judged on the difference that I make, as I have been given power to make serious interventions and decisions.

"Yes, I have been given a voice and I want to use that power.

"But I am aware there is a perception out there that high-flying black executives are tokens, and I do admit tokens exist.

"However, I see it as my responsibility to refuse to be used as a pawn, as I have always believed people make a choice to determine who they are.

"I am here to make a difference," Mlambo says emphatically.

Mlambo is the sort of woman who is set to rewrite the story of self-pity and victim-mentality among black Africans in the corporate world.

She has already turned that on its head by participating in the Comrades marathon three years in a row and always winning bronze medals.

"Of course, you need to be a little insane to take part in the Comrades, but I am banking on my sanity to make things happen in my new job," says Mlambo.

Finally, one of the most impressive things about this remarkable woman of so many talents is she remains a people's person, a rarity in the corporate world.

Already, a whole lot of people are looking up to her to make things happen.



COMMANDER . . . The appealing physique of Mlambo is an outward expression of strong will that is determined to succeed against all odds